
Humanitarian Assistance within the United States European Command More Than a Single Success Story

By

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October 2000, Africa

Our drive out of the capital city of Manzini in the Kingdom of Swaziland began routinely. Our destination, the Good Shepherd Hospital located in the Lubombo region of the country, is a non-governmental and non-denominational facility providing secondary care for a population of about 225,000 people, and also the site of an ongoing United States European Command (EUCOM) sponsored humanitarian assistance (HA) project. Once out of Manzini, it did not take long for us to sense the general tension and uncertainty creeping into the country. Every few kilometers young soldiers at barricaded checkpoints manned by armed police eyed every vehicle with quiet uneasiness. The soldiers carried loaded weapons in an assortment of ready positions. Even though it was a weekday morning, large crowds of uniformed students, intermingled with masses of other citizens, nervously milled about on many city streets. Our escort, an American expatriate employed by the American Embassy, told us that the country was in political turmoil due to recent government policies. The authorities in Swaziland had ordered a large presence of military and police to discourage civil disobedience and unrest. We were relieved to see the gates of the Good Shepherd Hospital, and also immensely thankful that the diplomatic license plates on our U.S. embassy vehicle had eased our travel. Driving past the gate guard, we immediately understood the urgency of the hospital's work. Woefully overcrowded and understaffed, the staff of the hospital was inundated with malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis, burn and HIV/AIDS patients. Bed occupancy was over 200 percent with overflow patients using available floor space in the administration offices. The ongoing EUCOM HA project will add a 50-bed pediatric ward to help relieve the overcrowding. The current arrangements forced the staff to house children with the adults suffering from malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

Our guides through the hospital, the hospital administrator and the head doctor, showed us how their neat, yet inadequate, facilities were strained beyond capacity. Most of the equipment was vintage 1950s, yet hospital personnel worked diligently and professionally, trying to accomplish the impossible. As we walked outside to examine the HA project, I stopped to chat with the construction crew. One of the crew members, a gaunt, thin man drenched in sweat, extended a leathery hand and thanked me for the work he was doing. In the midst of the usual clatter and debris of a construction site, we spoke different languages, yet had no problems understanding each other. This carpenter did not understand the world of military headquarters, and the interagency coordination, diplomacy, and politics that had brought me to his side, but he understood that my group was responsible for the funding of this much-needed addition to the only hospital in his community. He was deeply grateful, as were the rest of the construction crew. More important, however, than my personal encounter, was the clear fact that every hospital worker, construction crewman and patient knew that we were Americans and that the United States had made the pediatric ward possible.

I returned to Stuttgart with a new and strong personal commitment to the EUCOM humanitarian assistance program. It is a superb engagement tool and, it is doing great things for people who need help throughout the EUCOM area.

December 2000, The Balkans

Driving through Sarajevo's infamous Sniper Alley, I was reminded of the horrific scenes of wanton death and destruction which flashed across the world's television screens in the mid-1990s. As if frozen in time, countless pockmarked buildings dotted our path in dismal testimony to yet another conflict in the Balkan's troubled history. Leaving the American Embassy in Sarajevo, our destination was the village of Ivanica, a once prosperous community not far from the border with Croatia. Throughout our journey, we saw many reminders of the previous war and the current, tenuous peace. NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR) soldiers, new construction projects and the hollow, mute shells of destroyed buildings were in constant view. Our Bosnian driver, a twice-wounded, 28-year-old veteran of the war, humanized the brutal conflict and eased the tedium of our journey by recounting his experiences as a young infantryman defending his homeland.

Turning onto a dirt road, we sighted Ivanica. From a distance, the entire village looked like an unfinished section of tract housing. A closer inspection revealed an entirely different truth. The war had taken a terrible toll on Ivanica. Every building, including several immense warehouses, was in a different stage of repair and reconstruction. It was apparent that intense direct and indirect fires from weapons of varying calibers had caused destruction to most of the buildings in the village. Spent shell casings from many weapons lay in plain view. Men, women and children were working in the wet, December cold to improve their homes. The now-familiar porous buildings stood alongside the skeletons of warehouses and the debris of war. Unfortunately, we were growing accustomed to these scenes.

On a rise near the village we visited the construction site of the partially finished school that we had come to see. Hardened, dirty masons, carpenters and electricians, not much different from those I had seen in Africa, were going about their work in a quiet yet determined manner. Standing on the school's foundation, amongst piles of bricks, copper pipes and half-finished walls, we reviewed blueprints depicting the hoped-for result of the ongoing labors. This EUCOM humanitarian assistance project will be a small school for elementary schoolchildren, many of whom have still not returned to their homes since the war. The school will have several classrooms, a teachers' lounge, administration offices and, most importantly, heat and running water. Village leaders, clearly moved by this project, told us how they envisioned the school's opening in the spring of 2001. They emphatically told us that they would welcome back all the displaced children, whether they are Serb, Bosnian or Croat. Although the exact words were lost in the translations, it was obvious that the return of the children could begin the long process of healing in the community. While we may never fully understand the politics of this region, on that day we understood the sincerity and gratitude of the leaders of Ivanica, and their heartfelt desire for a return to normalcy.

HA Success in the EUCOM Area of Responsibility: One Officer's Perspective

Construction of the school in Ivanica and the pediatric ward in the Lubombo region are not unique events. Thankfully, new construction is occurring all over Africa and the Balkans, sponsored by many governments and non-governmental organizations. But these particular

projects are proposed, approved, funded, and coordinated by officers and officials of the government of the United States, through an interagency process between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of State. U.S. embassies submit proposed projects to Headquarters, United States European Command (HQ USEUCOM) J-4, where the Humanitarian Assistance (HA) Branch synchronizes three distinct Title 10 HA Programs. EUCOM HA staffs the work with the appropriate DoD agency, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, that approves and grants DoD funds for these annual projects. The results are over one hundred projects such as the school in Ivanica and the pediatric ward in the Lubombo region.

The relatively new USEUCOM HA Branch integrates HA activities, along with other engagement activities, in support of the commander in chief's (CINC's) strategy of readiness and engagement throughout his assigned area of responsibility. By supporting the CINC's strategy, the HA Branch integrates the ambassadors' objectives by working closely with each embassy's country team. This critical strategic partnership is currently performed by an aggressive and dedicated team of five persons, two Department of Defense civilians, a Marine officer, an Army officer, and an Air Force officer. The mission is daunting because USEUCOM's area of responsibility covers more than thirteen million square miles and includes ninety-one countries and territories. In addition, other countries and territories are also considered to be part of the CINC's area of interest. USEUCOM is the largest CINC area of responsibility in the world, and USEUCOM's HA program is the largest and most diverse within DoD. Currently there are over forty-five countries, from the Balkans and the Baltics to the former Soviet Union and Sub-Sahara Africa, being actively supported by USEUCOM's HA Branch.

The Trio of Programs

The two largest and most active programs are the Humanitarian Assistance Other (HA-Other) and the Humanitarian Assistance Program-Excess Property (HA-EP). The HA-Other program provides authority for the use of DoD funds to carry out HA "stand alone" projects as requested by American ambassadors. These projects are not performed in conjunction with military exercises or operational deployments. Funding from this program pays for contract and oversight costs by civilian and/or military teams for the purpose of rudimentary construction, disaster preparedness training and infrastructure improvements. In fiscal year 2001 over one-hundred projects in forty-seven countries received program approval and partial funding. Fiscal year 2001 marked a 60 percent growth in the HA-Other program's funding. Projects range from construction and refurbishment of schools, clinics and orphanages to the drilling of wells, bridge construction and disaster preparedness training. The HA-Other program funded the school in Ivanica and the pediatric ward in Swaziland.

The HA-EP program authorizes the donation of excess, non-lethal property to foreign governments and civilian organizations as requested by the Department of State through American embassies. Transportation and limited maintenance of donated property is also authorized. Donated property includes items such as medical, school, and office equipment, and supplies, vehicles and tents. USEUCOM locates, packages and transports the excess property to the American Embassy in the recipient countries. After accepting transfer, the American Embassies donate equipment to many different non-profit/non-denominational civilian organizations such as orphanages, schools and clinics. The HA-EP program supports over forty-five countries and has grown each year since the HA program's first year in existence. The school in Ivanica, as well as a number of other facilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, have received program approval and are scheduled for shipments of excess property in the near future.

The Humanitarian and Civic Assistance Program (HCA) authorizes USEUCOM component commands, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR), U.S. Air Forces Europe (USAFE), U.S. Navy Europe (NAVEUR), and Marine Forces Europe (MARFOREUR), to conduct HA and civic assistance projects in conjunction with operational deployments, training and/or contingencies. Training exercises, such as Medical Exercises in Africa (MEDFLAG), Medical Exercises in Europe (MEDCEUR) and in Central/Eastern Europe, Flintlock and West Africa Training Cruises (WATC) in Africa, and Joint/Combined Exchange Training (JCET), typically incorporate add-on medical and/or construction HCA projects. Funding authorized for this program may pay for consumable supplies and services required to carry out HCA activities. While limited to countries in which operational deployments take place, the HCA program has also grown within the last few years.

The Growth of EUCOM's HA Program

The HA program's dynamic growth can be attributed to several factors. One is the aggressive execution of projects by U.S. embassy country teams once projects are approved and funded. In recent years most countries receiving project approvals and funding have been able to grant construction contracts and/or coordinate desired training in the required time frame. This aggressiveness by country teams has ensured that funds were obligated appropriately and before their FY expiration date. In FY1999 less than one-half of one percent of HA funds were returned to EUCOM, and these were eventually diverted and obligated on another project. It is anticipated that even less will be returned for fiscal years 2000 and 2001.

Another growth factor is the HA program's inherent flexibility. Lauded by ambassadors throughout the area of responsibility, HA programs show quick, tangible results that are highly visible for years. In addition, HA-EP and HA-Other are funded with two-year monies, which allows ambassadors ample time to prioritize, plan and execute their projects. Although the approval process for HA programs is justifiably slow, and requests for project nominations are solicited only once a year, projects can still be requested out-of-cycle. This built-in program flexibility allows ambassadors to request projects at any time during the year. If projects are approved, and funding becomes available, ambassadors may immediately receive monies to execute their requests. The out-of-cycle request method is extremely popular, since this method allows ambassadors (especially new ambassadors) to set their own HA objectives, allows for re-prioritization of projects due to changes in countries' political climates and changing needs, and remedies a problem of high personnel turnover in most embassies. The school in Ivanica, as numerous other projects throughout the area of responsibility was an out-of-cycle request.

Initiatives by EUCOM's HA staff to enhance each country team's understanding of HA policies, request procedures, capabilities and programs have also contributed to the program's growth. Interaction with country teams is continuous and is done by the traditional means of communications, i.e., phone, fax and internet. While these methods of communication will continue due to the size of the region and number of recipient countries, the EUCOM HA staff believes that the occasional physical presence of its members in countries within the area of responsibility is also a form of engagement. The EUCOM HA branch chief, and both the HA-Other and HA-EP program managers, have conducted site visits to countries throughout the area of responsibility including Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Botswana, South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique. In addition, ambitious plans for future travel are in the planning stages. These visits have been an invaluable means of mutually enhancing understanding by the EUCOM staffs and the country teams' of each other's unique capabilities

and limitations. They also provide a forum for frank, face-to-face discussions with embassy counterparts on unique issues and problems within each country. More importantly, however, they enhance the credibility of EUCOM's HA staff officers with their country team counterparts. Their decisions, based on first-hand experience rather than knowledge gained from behind a desk, will undoubtedly enhance the accomplishment of the CINC's and each ambassador's objectives.

All three HA programs provide strategic engagement at the grass roots level. Uniformed Americans, whether they are entire units, survey or training teams, or a single contracting officer, interact with some of the neediest and most vulnerable citizens of the countries in which they operate. These citizens are often the catalysts for change in developing democracies. Long-lasting, tangible projects and the presence of these Americans can only bode well for future military, political and economic relations with these countries.

Conclusion

Humanitarian assistance programs may not get a lot of attention, but they provide a huge return on investment. It is worth repeating what many ambassadors have personally told us. They like HA programs because they are flexible and the results tangible. In some countries, due to U.S. sanctions or an undesirable political climate HA programs remain the only means by which the United States, through its embassies, conducts engagement activities. For those in and out of uniform unfamiliar with HA activities, it is worth reiterating that the strategic premises for conducting HA activities are central to U.S. diplomatic and military engagement. We must not forget that HA is a tool of the U.S. national military strategy. HA programs contribute to regional stability, demonstrate U.S. commitment, lend credibility to alliances, increase interaction with foreign militaries and their governments, and promote U.S. influence and access throughout the world. Engagement, through humanitarian assistance programs, will continue to be the overarching objective of those of us in DoD who are tasked to carry it out.

The examples above represent the spread of geography and HA work throughout EUCOM. However, reports could have been written about the excess property donated to the schools in Benin and Bosnia, the construction of clinics and hospitals in Lebanon and Lithuania, the school improvements in Morocco and Tunisia, the drilling of wells in Chad and Albania or the conduct of disaster management training in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Personal stories of individuals who received medical and dental assistance in conjunction with military deployments and exercises abound throughout Africa and Eastern Europe. Hundreds more success stories are in progress, and many more will be realized in the future. More importantly, the examples above highlight some of the unique, real-world issues faced on a daily basis by ambassadors and their country teams. Highlighting just one story in one country would have been an injustice to the hundreds of HA success stories that take place year-round. Even covering two stories overlooks the hundreds of dedicated Americans and foreign service nationals who often labor under circumstances that ordinary Americans would find difficult to understand, much less endure. Finally, the telling of only one story would have diminished the daily efforts of all those staff officers and civilians at EUCOM who make the CINC's HA programs a success.

Postlude: Ivanica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, December 2000

Before leaving the village of Ivanica, our military escort from the U.S. embassy in Sarajevo, a U.S. Army major led us to the Serb village leader's home, accompanied by the Bosnian and Croat leaders. It was symbolically important for him to pay his respects to each of the ethnic

leaders in the village. These gestures demonstrated the embassy's (and thus America's) neutrality towards all ethnic groups. The major found the elderly Serb working on his half-finished home. The major's attempt at a quick greeting and departure met with no success. The hospitable Serb was relentless and persuaded all of us to enter his humble yet neat home. He seated us in his tiny kitchen warmed by a wooden stove. Out of nowhere, bottles of liquor appeared along with other drinks and glasses. His wife poured as he spoke. It was a surreal scene. Seated next to each other on a crude wooden table were the three village leaders. They were bantering as if old school chums. The leaders were all of a different ethnic origin, one a Serb, one a Bosnian and one a Croat. Translating for us were two local nationals, one a civil engineer employed by a non-government organization and the other an employee of the U.S. embassy. Both women were Bosnian Moslems. Congeniality in the room prevailed. The village leaders continued to express their gratitude for the funding for their school and repeatedly thanked us in their language and in ours. They toasted to the school, to permanent peace, to more successes in the future and finally and most importantly for our team, to the United States of America.

About the Author

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